S Myrtle/Othello Street Project Frequently Asked Questions
November 3, 2011

1. **Why make changes on S Myrtle/Othello Streets?**
   The proposed safety improvements will:
   - reduce speeding and collisions
   - make it easier for pedestrian to cross the street
   - improve access for left turns at driveways and intersections, and
   - improve pedestrian and bicycle connections.

2. **What is the street classification of S Myrtle/Othello Street?**
   S Myrtle/Othello Street is a **principal arterial** between Martin Luther King Jr Way and Beacon Ave S. It is a **minor arterial** between Martin Luther King Jr Way and Rainier Ave S and a **collector arterial** between Rainier Ave S and Seward Park S.

3. **How does SDOT know that reducing the number of lanes won't decrease the capacity of the street? That doesn't make sense.**
   SDOT has installed center turn lanes on 27 streets over the past 30 years, without reducing capacity – a recent example is Fauntleroy Way SW. The turns motorists make onto S Myrtle/Othello Street's many side streets and driveways reduce the flow of traffic to only one effective through lane today. Adding a center turn lane creates more consistent traffic flow by removing conflicting movements from the travel lane.

4. **Aren't there too many cars on S Myrtle/Othello Street for this to work?**
   The capacity for a two-lane road is about 25,000 vehicles per day. The current average daily traffic on S Myrtle/Othello Street is about 11,600 motor vehicles each day (west of MLK) and 8,400 motor vehicles each day (east of MLK). National studies show that this level of traffic can be accommodated within the proposed 3-lane configuration. This is because left turning vehicles pull out of the travel lane into the left turn lane to wait to make a turn. This allows through traffic to flow unimpeded in the through lane.

TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

5. **What is the volume of traffic on S Myrtle/Othello St?**
   SDOT may consider center turn lanes for roadways with average daily traffic volumes of 25,000 or less. From traffic volume counts conducted by SDOT on S Myrtle Place, this roadway carries about 11,600 vehicles on an average day. SDOT monitors traffic volume on this street every year. Traffic has **decreased** on this street 11.5 % since 1999. Other projects that have been implemented with higher volume are:

Street	**Volume (average of 7 days of traffic)**	**AM Peak Hour**		**PM Peak Hour**		**Year implemented**
		Eastbound/ Northbound	**Westbound/ Southbound**	**Eastbound/ Northbound**	**Westbound/ Southbound**	
N 45th Street, from Latona Ave NE to Stone Way N	22,757	656	681	732	774	1972
Delridge Way SW, from SW Dakota St to SW Myrtle St	15,680	754	491	614	826	1988
Madison St, from 7th Ave to Broadway	20,788	788	840	761	867	1994
Fauntleroy Way SW from California Ave SW to SW Edmonds St	16,466	1021	378	497	977	2009
NE 125th St at 15th Ave NE	16,200	549	553	746	787	2011

6. **Won't changing the roadway from 4 lanes to 3 lanes increase congestion?**
SDOT has performed an analysis of level of service at all signal locations between Beacon Avenue S and Martin Luther King Jr Way S. SDOT also modeled travel time to compare the travel times on the existing roadway to the projected travel times along the proposed roadway. SDOT also took in-lane bus stops into account. The results of the expected changes in travel times are in the table below.
Peak volumes are heaviest in the afternoon. The following estimate is for afternoon peak hour (4-6pm) travel time from Beacon Avenue S to Seward Park Avenue S

		Current	Proposed	Increase
PM	Eastbound	3 minutes, 48 sec	4 minutes ,17 seconds	29 seconds
	Westbound	3 minutes, 45 sec	4 minutes ,7 seconds	22 seconds

7. **What are the level-of-service (LOS) calculations for all of the affected intersections that document the existing LOS and provide projections of the LOS with the proposed lane changes?** (Level of Service is a letter grade assigned to an intersection based on how much delay to vehicles occurs there. LOS A is the best with minimal delay and LOS F is the worst with most delay).
Note: No channelization changes proposed at Beacon Ave S & S Myrtle St or Martin Luther King JR Way & S Othello St

	AM Peak		**PM Peak**		**Delay Increase (sec)**
	Current Lanes	**Proposed**	**Current Lanes**	**Proposed**	
W Beacon Ave S & S Myrtle St[d]	B	B	C	C	n/a
E Beacon Ave S & S Myrtle St[d]	C	C	B	B	n/a
32nd Ave S & S Myrtle St	A	A	A	A	<1 AM <1 PM
39th Ave S & S Othello St	A	A	A	B	<1 AM 1.5 PM
MLK Jr Way S & S Othello St	E	E	F	F	n/a

8. What are the reported speeds for S Myrtle/Othello Street?

- 92% of eastbound vehicles and 85% of westbound vehicles drive faster than the posted speed limit of 30 MPH .
- The speed at which motorists are comfortable traveling (the 85th percentile speed) is 40.3 eastbound and 39.2 eastbound.

9. What is the collision history S Myrtle / Othello?

- From January 2008 to December 2010, there have been 112 collisions along this roadway.
- In that same period of time, 8 collisions involving pedestrians and 1 involving cyclists have occurred.

For all collisions, 37 percent resulted in injuries versus the citywide average of 33 percent for collisions on similar arterial streets.

10. What pedestrian and bicycle collisions have occurred on the corridor?

	Pedestrian	**Bicycle**
S Myrtle St between Beacon Ave S and 32nd Ave S	1	
S Othello St between Myrtle Pl and 38th Ave S	1	
S Othello St and 39th Ave S	2	
MLK and S Othello St	2	1
S Othello St and 43rd Ave S	1	
Rainier Ave S and S Othello St	1	
TOTAL	**8**	**1**

11. How will the proposed changes to S Myrtle/Othello Street affect speeding?

Creating a single through lane has been shown in national studies to calm traffic and to reduce collisions and speeds. S Myrtle/Othello Street currently experiences high speeds and high number of injury collisions. Thirty-three percent of collisions on the city's arterials result in injuries. On S Myrtle/Othello Street, the number is 37 percent. With the re-channelization, SDOT expects to see speeds closer to the posted speed limit.

12. **Did SDOT assess the pavement conditions on S Myrtle/Othello Street to provide bike lanes that can safely be utilized?**
    SDOT has evaluated the roadway pavement conditions and identified locations where pavement improvements are needed. Before re-channelization occurs, SDOT will repair the pavement for the entire section of the project area where needed. This will include the travel lanes in addition to the bike lanes.

TRAFFIC CONTROL

13. **What will SDOT do to guard against cut through traffic onto side streets?**
    Based on previous experience an increase in cut through traffic is not expected. National studies have shown that cut through traffic does not generally occur when traffic volumes are below 20,000 vehicles per day. S Myrtle/Othello Street volumes are 10,400 vehicles per day. For a recent example, the results of the Stone Way N road diet show that traffic has not diverted to adjacent streets. In fact, motor vehicle traffic on parallel routes has decreased even more substantially than the slight decline recorded on Stone Way.

14. **Will the proposed changes to S Myrtle/Othello Street make it harder to enter and exit side streets?**
    Entering and exiting side streets and driveways along S Myrtle/Othello Street will be easier with the new roadway configuration. Currently, motorists making left turns must cross two lanes of traffic. With the addition of a center turn lane, left turning vehicles can use the left turn lane as a refuge when making turns and they will cross one lane of on-coming traffic rather than two. Gaps in traffic will be created due to the existing signals on the corridor.

15. **Why is there not a center turn lane proposed between Beacon Ave S & 32nd Ave S?**
    In this section, Van Asselt Playfield on the north side of the street with no driveways or vehicle access points. As a result there are no left turns from the eastbound direction. For the westbound direction, there is limited demand for access to driveways. The street space is allocated to maintain unrestricted parking on the southside of the street and bicycle lanes.

16. **Can SDOT widen the road?**
    No, not without significant right-of-way acquisition and major capital investment. This is not supported by the traffic volumes on S Myrtle/Othello Street.

17. **Can SDOT increase the speed limit?**

The city traffic engineer and the Seattle City Council have the authority to set speed limits. Traffic volumes, the road configuration, and the needs of the neighborhood do not warrant increasing the speed limit. The speed limit can be raised, but at the cost of more injury accidents and less pedestrian safety. The lane reduction and installation of a center turn lane is preferred because it calms traffic.

18. **Why not control speeding with the use of traffic cameras and more enforcement by the Seattle Police Department (SPD)?**

The Seattle Police Department already periodically enforces the speed limit. Increased police presence is helpful, but is not a long-term answer to reducing speeds. Road diets are recognized for their traffic calming abilities. Overbuilt four-lane roads encourage speeding and place pedestrians and bicyclists at risk. On other roadways with road diets, aggressive speeding –>10 MPH over the speed limit-- was reduced. Speeding is only one factor improved by a road diet, in addition to reductions in speeds we expect to have lowered collision rates, improved traffic flow, and increased safety for all users of the roadway.

19. **How will the project impact emergency vehicles?**

The proposed changes will not negatively impact emergency vehicles. In fact, the center turn lane will provide space for emergency vehicles to pass.

20. **The hill on S Othello Street is very steep, why place bicycle facilities on such a steep hill and not a parallel residential street?**

Myrtle / Othello is an important and direct connection for all roadway users. The grade of the steepest hills on S Myrtle and Othello Streets are approximately 6.5%. East-west connections in Seattle tend to be hilly. Other examples of steep grades with bike facilities are Yesler Way over I-5 with a grade of 15% and E Cherry St with an average grade of 9%.

TRANSIT AND FREIGHT

21. **I catch the bus on S Myrtle/Othello Street. How will the changes affect my bus ride?**

SDOT is working closely with METRO transit to evaluate the impacts of the roadway changes on transit and transit users. METRO is in the process of evaluating the number and location of transit stops on S Myrtle/Othello Street to improve speed and reliability in coordination with the lane reconfiguration. METRO is also evaluating options to lessen the

impacts of in-lane transit stops on transit and motor vehicles. For transit users and pedestrians, the roadway will be easier to cross because there will be one lane of traffic to negotiate at a time to cross the street.

22. **Did SDOT consider impacts to truck traffic and deliveries?**
    Yes. S Myrtle/Othello Street is not a designated freight route. The current design includes 11 foot wide lanes for much of the corridor, this is a standard width that accommodates trucks and buses.

23. **Buses going up the hill will be slow. How has this issue been accounted for?**
    Yes, we have accounted for this in our travel time analysis.

24. **How can drivers get around stopped buses in a single lane with a center turn lane and bike lanes?**
    When a bus makes an in-lane stop on a roadway with a bike lane, the bus may pull to the curb in the bike lane. Cars behind the bus will have to wait; it is illegal to pass in the center turn lane.

PEDESTRIANS

25. **For pedestrians, how will the project make it easier to cross?**
    A four lane street is difficult for pedestrians to cross because of the risk of a multiple threat collision, a situation in which a driver in one lane stops for a pedestrian, but the driver in the next lane does not. We find that on busy streets the most beneficial improvements are either a reduction in the number of vehicle lanes or the installation of a traffic signal. With three lanes, pedestrians can cross one direction of traffic at a time and find refuge in the center lane. The three lane roadway also allows SDOT to evaluate crossing locations for installation of marked crosswalks and median crossing islands for example. These pedestrian features are rarely installed on four-lane roadways.

BICYCLES

26. **Why add bike lanes?**
    Bike lanes on arterial streets offer the most direct routes to work places, shopping areas, schools transit hubs and other destinations. A lack of bicycle facilities on the city's arterial street system prevents more people from making trips by bicycle. This project helps to fulfill Seattle's Complete Streets policy by ensuring that safe and comfortable bicycle travel

is facilitated. Bike lanes are being installed because they are a well studied facility type that, according to multiple studies, actually reduces the number of bicycle collisions as compared to the use of unmarked streets.

27. How do the bike facilities on S Myrtle/Othello Street connect with the rest of the bicycle route system?

Bike lanes on S Myrtle/Othello Street will connect to existing bicycle facilities on Beacon Avenue S and Swift Avenue S as well as the Chief Sealth Trail, the southeast Seattle signed bicycle route and the commonly used Lake Washington Loop. Biking to neighborhood destinations will be easier. Bike facilities will provide new transportation options to access the Van Asselt Community Center and playfield, New Holly Library, Safeway and other shops in the Othello urban village, Othello Link Light Rail Station and Othello Park.

28. What guides the city's bike and pedestrian improvements?

The City of Seattle adopted a Complete Streets Policy by resolution in 2007. The guiding principle of Complete Streets policy "is to design, operate and maintain Seattle's streets to promote safe and convenient access and travel for all users --- pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and people of all abilities, as well as freight and motor vehicle drivers". In addition the policy states that the " Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) will implement Complete Streets policy by designing, operating and maintaining the transportation network to improve travel conditions for bicyclists, pedestrians, transit and freight in a manner consistent with, and supportive of, the surrounding community".

29. I prefer to ride my bike on residential streets. Why doesn't the city consider using residential streets for bicycle routes?

SDOT encourages all bicyclists to exercise their own judgment regarding which roadways they feel most comfortable riding a bicycle on. To accommodate bicyclists of varying comfort levels the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan recommends on and off arterial routes. In the Othello area the plan recommends signed bicycle routes on residential streets parallel to Rainier Avenue S. SDOT has provided signage and pavement markings to help cyclists navigate this residential route.

PROJECT FUNDING

30. How is this project funded?

S Myrtle/Othello Street competed for funding with 37 other neighborhood projects through the Neighborhood Street Fund (funded by the Bridging the Gap levy approved by voters in 2006). Additional funding is also provided by the Bicycle Master Plan implementation.

31. How much will the project cost to install?

- $250,000 for pavement repair (SDOT's arterial maintenance program, subject to funding in 2012)
- $75,000-100,000 for removal of existing and installation of new paint and legends
- $650,000 for frontage improvements between Seward Park S and Rainier Ave S

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

32. What outreach did SDOT conduct for the Open House?

Here is the list of outreach tools we utilized to announce the open house and solicit feedback:

- Open House flyer for the over 4,000 properties and businesses located between Beacon Ave S and Seward Park Ave S and S Holly Street and S Kenyon Street on October 18, 2011.
- Fliers distributed to the Dept. of Neighborhood (DON) coordinators for distribution.
- E-mail notice sent to more than 25 neighborhood organizations (community and business groups, affinity groups, etc.)
- Web site
- Community open house held on November 3, 2011
- Comments taken until November 17, 2011.

33. S Othello is an Urban Village, did SDOT consider population growth and development for the future?

Yes. Development in S Othello has been increasing for the past few years, yet traffic volumes on **S Myrtle/Othello Street** have been steadily decreasing since 1999. Even if vehicle traffic does increase, excess capacity on the roadway will absorb the additional volume.

34. Othello has many small businesses. What will the economic impacts be to the business district with the changes to S Myrtle/Othello Street?

There are economic benefits to slowing speeds, calming traffic, and improving bicycle and pedestrian circulation in a business district. Auto drivers will be able to better access business driveways and parking lots S Myrtle/Othello Street with the installation of a center turn lane. One study showed that a 5 to 10 mph reduction in traffic speeds increased residential property values by about 20%. ("Evaluating Traffic Calming Benefits, Costs and Equity Impacts," Todd Litman, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 1999.)